

## **Naracoorte Caves In-Depth Expedition**

**29 October – 1 November 2021**

Over the last weekend in October, 24 Waterhouse Club members were privileged to tour the wonderful UNESCO World Heritage listed Naracoorte Caves with Dr. Liz Reed, Vertebrate Palaeontologist Researcher at the SA Museum.

To quote Liz: “The Naracoorte Caves preserve an exceptional vertebrate fossil record spanning the past 500,000 years. The bones of amphibians, birds, reptiles and mammals are buried in vast deposits of sediment deep within limestone caves. Among the many animals found are the megafauna, lost giants of the Pleistocene.”

Liz is passionate about palaeontology and the caves, as shown by the title of her presentation to the Club at the Museum in 2020: “Love at First Cave”. She splits her time weekly between the caves in Naracoorte and the Museum and the University in Adelaide. She knows the Caves intimately and is a very informative and engaging guide.

Our comprehensive tour of the caves complex provided a detailed understanding of the geological processes that led to their formation, as well as the data now being gleaned from the excavation of sediment beds which in places contain a fossil and climate record up to 500,000 years old.

- Blanche Cave – a partially open cave used by locals in the past for social events, concerts, etc., but these days an important palaeontological excavation site with sediment records going back tens of thousands of years.
- Alexandra Cave – a spectacular cave with beautiful stalactites, stalagmites and other limestone formations, now also the site of excavations.
- Wonambi Fossil Centre – the caves complex’s museum containing examples of megafauna skeletons recovered from the caves, as well as a recreation of the environment as existed forty thousand years ago with life-sized models of the now-extinct creatures.
- Fossil laboratory - Liz’s Naracoorte base where the group was introduced to the detailed hands-on work involved in sorting the bones that are recovered from the caves’ sediment beds. A Thylacoleo tooth was found in one sample!
- Bat Viewing Centre – where delightful Southern Bent Wing bats can be viewed at close quarters in their cave roost below without disturbance using CCTV.
- Victoria Fossil Cave – the jewel in the crown of the complex, which as well as having intricate limestone formations has extensive sediment beds which have produced the largest quantity and variety of megafauna fossils since its discovery in 1969.

Of course, no visit to this area is complete without sampling some of the excellent produce of local wineries, and this trip was no exception. In addition to fine local wines with dinner, one afternoon we were treated to an underground tasting organised by the Wratttonbully Wine Producers Group in Schultz’s Cave on the Treasury Wine Estate vineyard at Wratttonbully. This cave has its entrance literally between the rows of vines! Five producers showcased their wares and took orders. It was a unique and very special event much appreciated by everyone.

The expedition was based at the Avenue Inn in Fourth Avenue, a quiet suburban street in Naracoorte. Its rooms had been recently refurbished to a high standard and the quality of the offerings in the café - restaurant were very good. The group enjoyed a very good dinner

there on the first night of the expedition, and sampled the delights of other pubs and restaurants in Naracoorte on the other two nights.

Morning coffees and lunches were provided by the excellent Caves Café.

We were pleased to welcome guests at our dinners by way of thanks and appreciation. One night we were joined by Mr. Thomas Shortt, NPWS Manager of the Naracoorte Caves, and Liz's partner, Steve, who was previously manager of the Naracoorte Caves. On another night we had the pleasure of the company of Ms. Erika Vickery, Mayor of Naracoorte and Lucindale Council which is a strong supporter of the Caves, and Mr. Peter Majoros, Executive Officer, World Heritage, for Naracoorte Caves.

The expedition was thoroughly enjoyed by all, the only regret being that we could take 24 people for cave capacity reasons. The Club is therefore planning to repeat the expedition in the latter part of 2022, and Liz has kindly agreed to show another lucky group around the amazing Naracoorte Caves.

Mark Mussared  
Expedition Leader  
January 2022